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ABSTRACT

In a study of the role of internal communication as a contributor to total organizational effectiveness, 300 employees of a large manufacturing plant were surveyed to determine the relationship between supervisory communication and employee noninjury medical visits to the company hospital. The survey form consisted of 61 items requesting information on (1) supervisory communication style, (2) peer leadership, (3) group processes, (4) organizational climate, (5) psychological climate, (6) working conditions, (7) regular overtime, (8) job conditions, and (9) overall job satisfaction. Two questions on the frequency of personal visits to the company hospital were also included. Only two factors produced a significant correlation with the number of personal medical visits--supervisory communication style and group processes--indicating that the lower the supervisory communication style rating, the greater the number of noninjury hospital visits. To gain further insights into these findings, interviews were conducted with 30 randomly selected employees. The results showed that supervisors with effective communication styles demonstrated genuine concern for employees, honesty, fairness, and an ability to get problems corrected while considering the long-term effects. Conversely, supervisors with ineffective communication styles were described as displaying a superior attitude, giving orders, and deciding issues in their own best interests, rather than in the interests of the majority. (A copy of the survey form used is appended). (HTH)

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FREQUENCY OF NON-INJURY EMPLOYEE MEDICAL VISITS AS A FUNCTION OF SUPERVISORY COMMUNICATION

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FREQUENCY OF NON-INJURY EMPLOYEE MEDICAL VISITS AS A FUNCTION OF SUPERVISORY COMMUNICATION

Concern has been increasingly expressed in recent years about the decline in American industrial productivity. This decline contributes to higher inflation, and as a result, a lower across-the-board standard of living. Recent research has been aimed at documenting the way in which effective supervisory and managerial communication can contribute to overall organizational effectiveness and productivity. While organizational effectiveness is obviously a result of a constellation of various forces, these studies have demonstrated that communication plays a significant part in contributing to or detracting from this end. Organizations need accurate and timely information about what is going on in their relevant environments, but they also need the internal capability to process this information. This paper reports a study conducted to more specifically document the role of internal communication as a contributor to total organizational effectiveness.

Review of Literature

Hain and Widgery (1973) administered perceptual measures to employees of four large manufacturing plants. A significant positive correlation (.68) was found between communication effectiveness and employee satisfaction. A significant negative correlation (-.76) was found between ratings of supervisory leadership discrepancy (the difference between actual and ideal leadership) and communication effectiveness. The smaller the disparity between the perceived ideal and real supervisor, the more favorable were the ratings of communication effectiveness. In addition,

a significant negative correlation (-.61) was found between supervisory leadership discrepancy and employee satisfaction. In other words, the smaller the leadership discrepancy, the greater the employee satisfaction.

Hain and Tubbs (1974) surveyed 350 employees in five departments of a large organization. Data were obtained for perceived communication effectiveness (upward, lateral, downward) and three performance indices: grievances, absenteeism, and efficiency. Significant correlations were found between the communication effectiveness scores and the rankings of the five departments on the three performance indices.

In a study of employees in six manufacturing and service organizations, Jenkins (1977) found a correlation between supervisory communication effectiveness and worker performance. Worker performance was defined in this study as quantity of work, quality of work, net performance (quantity minus quality), and absenteeism.

Tubbs and Judkins (1978) conducted a study measuring communication effectiveness in two comparable plants within a division of a large organization. One of these plants was the most productive and generated the highest level of product quality; the other plant generated the lowest product quality in the division. Higher ratings of communication effectiveness were found for the more productive plant than for the other one.

Tubbs and Porter (1978) surveyed 121 randomly selected employees of a large automotive assembly plant. Grievance activity data for these employees were simultaneously obtained. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to determine the predictive ability of the following eight factors as they might relate to grievance activity: (1) supervisory communication style; (2) overall satisfaction; (3) economic benefits and

security; (4) working conditions; (5) regular overtime; (6) job; (7) union-management relations; and (8) bargaining power. The eight variables together accounted for 22% of the total variance. The single best predictor was supervisory communication style, accounting for 17% of the variance. The second best predictor was union-management relations, accounting for 3.8% of the variance. These two variables alone accounted for 20.8% of the 22% variance explained. The other six variables, therefore, added little.

Tubbs and Widgery (1978) reported the results of a two-year study they conducted in which communication effectiveness was measured before and after the implementation of a communication improvement program within an organization. Not only were significant improvements shown in communication effectiveness, but the organization was able to document a seven million dollar savings in reduced scrap and absenteeism over the course of the study. In addition, the plant moved from its 15th place ranking in the division to third based on its operating performance.

The Present Study

In a recent state-of-the-art review article, Goldhaber, Yates, Porter, and Lesniak (1978) argued that:

> More concern should be focused on measuring organizational effectiveness variables. . . [e.g.] turnover, absenteeism, grievances. . . . (page 92)

Goldhaber, et. al. go on further to state that:

> . . . the factors influencing stress and the locus of that stress could be identified. These (communication) factors could be related to organizational incidents of stress such as

the number of people in counseling programs, alcoholism rates, sick leave, number of uncompleted assignments, or resignations.

On the basis of the foregoing rationale and literature review, the present study was proposed. Specifically, this study attempted to determine the relationship between supervisory communication and employee non-injury medical visits. These visits by definition do not involve any injuries or serious illnesses and represent presumably a way of measuring an employee's self-perceived level of fitness to perform on the job. These visits had systematically increased in the organization involved in this research over a three-year period and were generally perceived by upper management as a symptom that the organization was not functioning as effectively as it once had been.

For the purposes of this study, 300 employees of a large manufacturing plant (5% of the entire employee pool) were contacted. Random selection was achieved through extraction of names from the corporate Personal Paid Holiday Numbering System.

Plant employees were requested to complete a modified version of Likert's (1967) Profile of Organizational Characteristics (for a copy of the questionnaire, refer to the Appendix); this modified version has been used in studies by Widgery and Tubbs (1975), Tubbs and Judkins (1978), Tubbs and Widgery (1978), and Tubbs and Porter (1978).

The questionnaire contains 61 Likert scale items which are designed to obtain information pertaining to nine human resource accounting content areas: (1) supervisory communication style; (2) peer leadership; (3) group processes; (4) organizational climate; (5) psychological climate; (6) working conditions; (7) regular overtime; (8) job conditions; and

(9) overall satisfaction. In addition, for the purposes of this study, two items were included on the questionnaire to determine the frequency of the "personal visits."

Two statistical procedures were employed to analyze the data resulting from this study. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the amount of variance in "personal visits" to the plant hospital that could be explained by the nine human resource factors measured by the questionnaire. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to ascertain the relative predictive ability of the various human resource factors in terms of "personal visits" to the plant hospital. Finally, Pearson correlation coefficients were obtained to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

The nine human resource factors taken together accounted for 38% of the total variance. The factor which was the single best predictor was Supervisory Communication Style, which accounted for 44% of the explained variance. The second best predictor was Group Processes, which accounted for 6% of the explained variance. These two factors were the only ones which were significant at the .05 level. Only two of the human resource factors produced a significant correlation with personal medical visits at the .01 level: (1) Supervisory Communication Style, a correlation of -.803; and (2) Group Processes, a correlation of -.651.

In order to provide further insights into these findings, ad hoc interviews of ten percent of the surveyed employees were conducted. These employees were randomly chosen by alphabetizing their names and selecting every tenth one.

The findings of the post-survey interviews are presented below. Each question is stated and followed by an explanation of the results.

A full tabulation of these findings is provided in the Appendix.

1. When you look at your supervisor's style of managing, what qualities do you like about it?

More than 75% of the 29 people felt that it was crucial a supervisor show genuine concern toward employees. Many employees stated that this concern is directed toward both work-related items and outside problems. In addition, the traits of honesty and fairness were considered relevant. Some people stated that lying was the worst thing a supervisor could do. The supervisor's ability to get problems corrected was also a common response to this question.

2. What things do you dislike about your supervisor's style?

Every single interviewee stated that their supervisor, at one time or another, displayed a superior attitude. While many employees made it clear that this attitude was not omnipresent, just as many felt it was an everyday occurrence. The second most popular response to this question dealt with the concept of giving orders, which can be related to the superior attitude idea.

3. Everyday, decisions are made at your workplace that affect many people. What do you like about the way decisions are made in your work group?

Only two basic response categories were given to this question. The first dealt with employee input. More than half of the people felt "good" about being asked for their opinions. Surprisingly, many employees realized there are times when their input should not be solicited. In addition, the employees felt that decision making should consider the majority's point of view.

4. What do you dislike about the way decisions are made?

More than half of the people felt the decisions are made in the best interest of the decision maker, usually perceived as the supervisor. They felt that in the majority of cases, the people have to abide by the decision. Almost as many employees felt the decision made did not always address the problem. If it did, about 24 percent of the interviewees felt the long-term effects of the decision were not considered.

The results of this study are consistent with the previous studies cited. Again, strong support for the relationship between supervisory communication and organizational effectiveness (as defined here by personal medical visits) was found. First, the stepwise regression analysis performed for this study revealed that Supervisory Communication is the most important predictor of employee personal visits to the plant hospital. Second, a Pearson correlation was found between supervisory communication style and personal hospital visits. Thus, the lower the supervisory communication rating, the greater number of hospital visits.

Third, the interview results demonstrate quite clearly that the supervisory communication style which was seen as effective was described as demonstrating genuine concern, honesty, fairness and the ability to get problems corrected while considering the long-term effects. Conversely, the supervisory communication style which was seen as ineffective was described as displaying a superior attitude, giving orders, and deciding issues on the basis of one's own best interests, rather than the best interests of the majority.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

1. When you look at your supervisor's style of managing, what qualities do you like about it?

	# of responses	% of people	% of responses
Concern about employees	22	75.9	32.4
Fairness	14	48.3	20.6
Honesty	12	41.4	17.6
Ability to get problems corrected	12	41.4	17.6
Other	8	27.6	11.8

2. What things do you dislike about your supervisor's style?

	# of responses	% of people	% of responses
Superior attitude	29	100.0	30.5
Order giving	27	93.1	28.4
No concern toward employees	14	48.3	14.7
Too production oriented	12	41.4	12.6
Inhumane treatment of employees	5	17.2	5.3
Other	8	27.6	8.4

3. Every day, decisions are made at work that affect many people. What do you like about the way decisions are made in your work group?

	# of responses	% of people	% of responses
Asking for employee input	15	51.7	45.4
Considering the majority's point of view	13	44.8	39.4
Don't know	5	17.2	15.2

4. What do you dislike about the way decisions are made?

	# of responses	% of people	% of responses
Decision made is one that's best for the supervisor	15	51.7	35.7
Decision doesn't relate to problem at hand	12	41.4	28.6
Long-term effects aren't considered	7	24.1	16.7
All possibilities aren't recognized	5	17.2	11.9
Other	3	10.3	7.1

THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

All questions can be answered by circling the number next to each question, which best indicates how you feel about that question. For each question, unless otherwise indicated, the response categories are:

1. To a very little extent.
2. To a little extent.
3. To some extent.
4. To a great extent.
5. To a very great extent.

		very little ←				→ very great
1.	To what extent is your supervisor friendly and easy to approach?	1	2	3	4	5
2.	When you talk with your supervisor, to what extent does he pay attention to what you are saying?	1	2	3	4	5
3.	To what extent is your supervisor willing to listen to your problems?	1	2	3	4	5
4.	How much does your supervisor encourage people to give their best effort?	1	2	3	4	5
5.	To what extent does your supervisor maintain high standards of performance?	1	2	3	4	5
6.	To what extent does your supervisor show you how to improve your performance?	1	2	3	4	5
7.	To what extent does your supervisor provide the help you need so that you can schedule work ahead of time?	1	2	3	4	5

		← very little				very great →
8.	To what extent does your supervisor offer new ideas for solving job-related problems?	1	2	3	4	5
9.	To what extent does your supervisor encourage the persons who work for him to work as a team?	1	2	3	4	5
10.	To what extent does your supervisor encourage people who work for him to exchange opinions and ideas?	1	2	3	4	5
11.	How friendly and easy to approach are the people in your work group?	1	2	3	4	5
12.	When you talk with persons in your work group, to what extent do they pay attention to what you're saying?	1	2	3	4	5
13.	To what extent are persons in your work group willing to listen to your problems?	1	2	3	4	5
14.	How much do persons in your work group encourage each other to give their best effort?	1	2	3	4	5
15.	To what extent do persons in your work group maintain high standards of performance?	1	2	3	4	5
16.	To what extent do persons in your work group help you find ways to do a better job?	1	2	3	4	5
17.	To what extent do persons in your work group provide the help you need so that you can plan, organize, and schedule ahead of time?	1	2	3	4	5
18.	To what extent do persons in your work group offer each other new ideas for solving job-related problems?	1	2	3	4	5

		very little ←				→ very great
19.	How much do persons in your work group encourage each other to work as a team?	1	2	3	4	5
20.	How much do persons in your work group emphasize a team goal?	1	2	3	4	5
21.	How adequate for your needs is the amount of information you get about what is going on in other departments or shifts?	1	2	3	4	5
22.	How receptive are those above to your ideas and suggestions?	1	2	3	4	5
23.	To what extent do persons in your work group keep each other informed about important events and situations?	1	2	3	4	5
24.	How hard do people try to see that their supervisor and his superiors get full and accurate information about work problems?	1	2	3	4	5
25.	How are differences and disagreements between units and departments handled at Fleetwood? (CHOOSE ONE OF THE FIVE)					
	1. Disagreements are almost always avoided, denied, or suppressed.					
	2. Disagreements are often avoided, denied, or suppressed.					
	3. Sometimes disagreements are accepted and worked through; sometimes they are avoided or suppressed.					
	4. Disagreements are usually accepted as necessary and desirable and are worked through.					
	5. Disagreements are almost always accepted as necessary and desirable and are worked through.	1	2	3	4	5

26. Which of the following best best describes the manner in which problems between departments are generally resolved? (CHOOSE ONE OF THE FIVE)

1. Little is done about these problems -- they continue to exist.

2. Little is done about these problems -- they work themselves out with time.

3. The problems are appealed to a higher level in the organization -- but often are still not resolved.

4. The problems are appealed to a higher level in the organization -- and are usually resolved there.

5. The problems are worked out at the level where they appear through mutual effort and understanding.

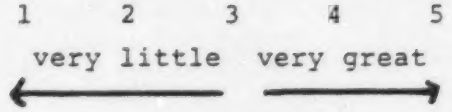
27. To what extent do persons in different departments plan together and coordinate their efforts?

28. To what extent does your work group make good decisions and solve problems well?

29. In working with other departments, problems are bound to arise from time to time. When these problems occur, to what extent are they handled?

30. How are objectives set in this company? (CHOOSE ONE OF THE FIVE)

1. Objectives are announced with no opportunity to raise questions or give comments.



2. Objectives are announced and explained, and an opportunity is then given to ask questions.

3. Objectives are drawn up, but are discussed with subordinates and sometimes modified before being issued.

4. Specific alternative objectives are drawn up by supervisors, and subordinates are asked to discuss them and indicate the one they think is best.

5. Problems are presented to those persons who are involved, and the objectives felt to be best are then set by the subordinates and the supervisor jointly, by group participation and discussion.

	1	2	3	4	5
	very little ←				→ very great
31. To what extent are you told what you need to know to do your job in the best possible way?	1	2	3	4	5
32. People at all levels of a company usually have know-how that could be of use to decision makers. To what extent is information widely shared in this company so that those who make decisions have access to all available know-how?	1	2	3	4	5
33. In this company, to what extent are decisions made at those levels where the most adequate and accurate information is available?	1	2	3	4	5
34. To what extent are the persons who make decisions aware of the problems at lower levels in the company?	1	2	3	4	5
35. To what extent do you enjoy performing the actual day-to-day activities that make up your job?	1	2	3	4	5

		very little ←				→ very great
36.	How much do you look forward to coming to work each day?	1	2	3	4	5
37.	To what extent are there things about working here (people, policies, or conditions) that encourage you to work hard?	1	2	3	4	5
38.	Why do people work hard in this company? (CHOOSE ONE OF THE FIVE)					
	1. Just to keep their job and avoid being chewed out.					
	2. To keep their jobs and make money.					
	3. To keep their jobs, make money, and to seek promotions.					
	4. To keep their jobs, make money, seek promotions, and for the satisfaction of a job well done.					
	5. To keep their jobs, make money, seek promotions, do a satisfying job, and because other people in their work group expect it.	1	2	3	4	5
39.	To what extent does your job provide the means for supporting you and your family at the living standards that you expected it to?	1	2	3	4	5
40.	To what extent does your job provide the security you expected it to?	1	2	3	4	5
41.	To what extent are your relationships with your fellow workers what you expected them to be?	1	2	3	4	5
42.	To what extent do you receive the recognition for doing your job that you expected to receive?	1	2	3	4	5

43. To what extent does your job allow you to fully use your skills, talents, and abilities as you expected to? 1 2 3 4 5

PLEASE INDICATE HOW MUCH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BY CIRCLING ONE OF THE FIVE NUMBERS.

		disagree				agree
44.	My immediate supervisor treats everyone fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
45.	My immediate supervisor is interested in listening to what I have to say.	1	2	3	4	5
46.	My immediate supervisor is one of the best people to work with.	1	2	3	4	5
47.	I respect my immediate supervisor as a leader.	1	2	3	4	5
48.	In my work area, I am free of annoying distractions.	1	2	3	4	5
49.	In my work area, there is good ventialtion.	1	2	3	4	5
50.	In my work area, the temperature is comfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
51.	The layout of my work space is convenient.	1	2	3	4	5
52.	There is good housekeeping in my work area.	1	2	3	4	5
53.	Fleetwood should hire more employees and reduce the amount of regular overtime.	1	2	3	4	5
54.	I would prefer working no overtime.	1	2	3	4	5
55.	When I am working, I feel I have enough time to get everything done.	1	2	3	4	5
56.	I feel like I am being hurried when I do my job.	1	2	3	4	5

		disagree			agree	
57.	I have difficulty getting tools and supplies when I need them on my job.	1	2	3	4	5

FOR THE NEXT FOUR QUESTIONS, USE THE FOLLOWING ALTERNATIVES:

1. Very dissatisfied
2. Somewhat dissatisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Somewhat satisfied
5. Very satisfied

58.	All in all, how satisfied are you with this company, compared to others you are familiar with?	1	2	3	4	5
59.	All in all, how satisfied are you with your job?	1	2	3	4	5
60.	Considering your skills and the effort you put into the work, how satisfied are you with your pay?	1	2	3	4	5
61.	All in all, how satisfied are you with the persons in your work group?	1	2	3	4	5

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ABOUT YOU IS FOR STATISTICAL PURPOSES ONLY. PLEASE COMPLETE THE QUESTIONS BY PLACING A CHECKMARK BY THE RIGHT ANSWER OR BY FILLING IN THE BLANKS.

62. _____Male

_____Female

63. _____White

_____Black

_____Oriental

_____American Indian

_____Spanish Speaking American

_____Other (Please Specify)_____

64. How long have you worked here?

_____Less than one year

_____One to Three Years

_____Three to Six Years

_____Six to Nine Years

_____Nine to Twelve Years

_____Twelve to Eighteen Years

_____Eighteen to 21 Years

_____21 to 25 Years

_____25 to 30 Years

_____Over 30 Years

65. What department do you work in? _____

66. What is your age? _____

67. Approximately how many times have you been to the Medical Department for any injuries or illnesses within the past year?

_____

68. Approximately how many times have you been to the Medical Department for on-the-job injuries within the past year?

_____

THANK YOU ! ! !